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PP RUEHDBU RUEHFL RUEHKW RUEHLA RUEHROV RUEHSR

DE RUEHBM #0981/01 1641633

ZNY CCCCC ZZH

P 131633Z JUN 06

FM AMEMBASSY BUCHAREST

TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 4651

INFO RUEHZL/EUROPEAN POLITICAL COLLECTIVE

RHEHNSC/NSC WASHDC

RUEKJCS/SECDEF WASHINGTON DC

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 BUCHAREST 000981

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E.O. 12958: DECL: 06/13/2016

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GG, MD, RS, TU, UP, RO

SUBJECT: ROMANIAN BLACK SEA FORUM: FIRST STEPS TOWARD A REGIONAL DIALOGUE AND CLOSER LINKS WESTWARD

REF: A. BUCHAREST 902

[1B.](#) BUCHAREST 519

Classified By: CDA Mark Taplin for Reasons 1.4(a), (b) and (d)

[¶1.](#) (C) Summary. Senior GOR officials assert that they will use the momentum initiated by the June 5 "Black Sea Forum for Dialogue and Partnership" summit in Bucharest as a "launching pad" for further dialogue and cooperation in the Black Sea region. Romanian interlocutors have also expressed gratitude for U.S. support for the Forum, culminating in Deputy National Security Advisor J.D. Crouch's announcement of USG support for the German Marshall Fund's Black Sea Trust. The most discordant note at the conference was the refusal of Russia to participate beyond "observer status" or to sign the Forum joint declaration, which was endorsed by every other country in the Black Sea region. Romanian interlocutors insist, however, that the region's willingness to move forward without Russian buy-in represents a "psychological breakthrough." Much of the credit for the Forum's overall success lies with President Basescu, who has placed Black Sea issues, including closer regional links with NATO and the EU, front and center on his foreign policy agenda. End Summary.

[¶2.](#) (SBU) After nearly a year of diplomatic and logistical fits and starts, Romania finally held the "Black Sea Forum for Dialogue and Partnership" summit in Bucharest on June 5. Deputy National Security Advisor J.D. Crouch headed the U.S. delegation to the event and announced the launching of The Black Sea Trust, in partnership with the German Marshall Fund of the United States (GMFUS) and the Romanian Government. Dr. Crouch observed in his remarks that the Trust would "fund programs across the region to strengthen cross-border cooperation, civic participation, democratic governance, and the rule of law." He confirmed that the USG "intends to make a significant contribution this year to the initiative." (Note. GMFUS characterizes the Trust as a ten-plus year "grant making initiative" and anticipates cash and in-kind commitments totaling more than USD 20 million at the time of the launch, and growth of the Trust's funding to more than USD 40 million over its lifetime. End Note.) Several media reports underscored that Dr. Crouch's announcement was the first concrete initiative stemming from the Forum.

[¶3.](#) (C) Senior GOR officials, from President Basescu on down, have made it clear that Romania greatly appreciated Dr. Crouch's attendance at the Forum. Stelian Stoian, MFA Director General for Global Affairs, told acting Pol Chief June 9 that Crouch's presence, along with his announcement of the Black Sea Trust, sent "a very strong message" that Black

Sea regional cooperation and development was "truly important to the U.S. government." The Trust Fund, Stoian continued, is "a big deal" for both Romania and the greater Black Sea region. Stoian, who was among several senior GOR officials who consulted periodically with Emboffs in the months leading up to the Forum, underscored that he and his colleagues appreciated USG help in preparing for the Forum and in urging other nations to participate at a senior level. In separate conversations during and after the Forum, several Romanian officials and NGO leaders also expressed their appreciation for Dr. Crouch's statement of support for the GMFUS, stressing that U.S. encouragement of Romanian efforts to organize the Forum and attract high level attendance helped ensure the event's success -- and would provide impetus to efforts to develop tangible cooperation among the Black Sea littoral states, and beyond.

Joint Declaration Provides a Starting Point

¶4. (SBU) The other noteworthy achievement of the June 5 Forum -- and the goal upon which GOR planners had focused since last summer -- was the signature by the presidents of Armenia, Azerbaijan, Georgia, Moldova, Romania, and Ukraine, as well as senior representatives from Bulgaria, Greece and Turkey, of a joint declaration characterizing the Forum as &a process that will serve as a regional platform designed primarily to define a common vision of democratic and sustainable development.⁸ It will likewise "help consolidate regional commonalities, through providing new ideas and proposals for an intensified dialogue and cooperation within the Black Sea region.⁸ The signatory states pledge that &the Forum will have no permanent structures or bodies and will not duplicate the activities of the existing mechanisms of cooperation in the region.⁸ In

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the months leading up to the Forum, the Romanians at times found the negotiations over the text daunting, especially with Russia, Turkey and Greece, but adjusted by focusing on less controversial themes and goals, such as good governance and sustainable development. The English version of the Joint Declaration and other details about the Forum are available at www.mae.ro. Senior officials from NATO, OSCE, UN, EU, IOM the Council of Europe, the UK, France and Germany and leading NGOs also participated in the Forum, delivering speeches at the Forum's opening session in support of the growing importance of the Black Sea region.

¶5. (SBU) In his remarks at the conference, President Basescu insisted that &responsibility for evolution in the Black Sea region lies mainly with the states of the region.⁸ According to Basescu, the region now has "a great opportunity to become an attractive partner for the main economic powers, provided it transforms itself from a source of problems into a generator of solutions in the European and global context.⁸ In his speech, Basescu also expressed his appreciation for the attention given by the U.S. government to the Black Sea region and highlighted the initiatives of American NGOs in promoting the development and democratization of the area, including the Black Sea Trust.

Where Was Ivan?

¶6. (C) Russia was the only Black Sea littoral state which did not sign the Joint Declaration and which did not send a senior representative from its capital. Russia's &observer" at the Forum was its Ambassador to Romania, Aleksandr Tolkach, who told journalists that &there are too many initiatives⁸ for cooperation in the Black Sea region and that the Russian position on this subject was "well-known." One Romanian expert on Russia labeled this chariness a result of continuing fear of U.S. efforts to establish a "cordon sanitaire" around the Black Sea. President Basescu stressed in his Forum speech, however, that &no process of cooperation within the Black Sea Region is complete without the substantial contribution of Russia.⁸

Breaking a "Psychological Barrier"

¶7. (C) That said, GOR officials have consistently stressed to us their determination to focus on boosting regional cooperation, even if the Russians won't play ball. Even before the Forum, the MFA Director General for Political Affairs, Ovidiu Dranga, underscored that "the ship is leaving the dock, whether or not the Russians are on board." MFA DG Stoian asserted that the Forum's success sans Russian participation "broke a psychological barrier because it marked the first time the countries in the region got together and discussed their problems without the Russians." Pausing for a moment, Stoian argued that the Forum shattered the perception that "nothing could happen without Russian participation." According to Stoian, Russia will join in "sooner or later," now that it has seen that other nations in the region will act, with or without Russian buy-in. Bucharest could take comfort from the fact that the other key Black Sea country, Turkey, did in the end see fit to take part in the Forum proceedings at a respectable level, even if its attitude towards the Romanian initiative remained ambivalent. Although Romanian media reaction was mixed, one leading analyst commented that the ability of Romania to attract so many regional heads of state to the Forum, and provide a venue for discussions between Armenia and Azerbaijan, was proof enough that the Forum had been a "big success" for Romanian foreign policy.

Full Steam Ahead!

¶8. (C) Comment. Stoian and other senior Romanian officials have underscored to us that the Forum marked a beginning of a process of heightened regional cooperation and dialogue, rather than an end in itself. While the countries of the region still have a long way to go in overcoming centuries of suspicion and rivalry, the Forum may have represented a necessary first step in boosting a more positive, less strained approach to regional cooperation. The Romanians promise us they will not rest on their oars but intend to press ahead in promoting follow-up, including what Bucharest hopes will be a second Forum event next year in Turkey. Regardless of whether the Romanians are able to keep the Forum a living framework, however, we agree with Stoian's observation that the concept of a Black Sea region is now

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irrevocably "on the table, both at NATO and the EU." While President Basescu had hoped for more -- he was disappointed, in particular, by the unexpected absence of Bulgarian President Purvanov -- the Forum advanced the foreign policy cause that is perhaps nearest and dearest to his heart, namely that of building links between the Black Sea region and western partners and institutions. The attitude of European participants ran the gamut, from bemused to boisterous, but there is reason to believe that they, too, took notice. And whatever shortfalls there were in the practical planning of the event by the Romanian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Forum as seen from Bucharest was still a notable success. Likewise, our goal of being broadly supportive of this Romanian effort, as a show of support for an especially valuable partner, was also clearly achieved. It will pay dividends down the road, for some time to come.
End Comment.

¶9. (U) Amembassy Bucharest's reporting telegrams are available on the Bucharest SIPRNet website:
www.state.sgov.gov/p/eur/bucharest
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